# Zoroastrianism

## Demographics

- There are an estimated 125,000 Zoroastrians worldwide.
- The majority of Zoroastrians live in India (where they are known as Parsis), especially Gujarat and Mumbai, but a minority live in Iran as well as western diaspora.
- The liturgical language of Zoroastrianism is Avestan, an extinct Iranian language. Later Zoroastrian texts are in Pahlavi, another extinct Iranian language.

## History

### Pre-Islamic Conquest

- Early
  - Iranians and Indo-Aryans diverged during the third millennium BCE, with Iranians migrating through Central Asia towards the Iranian plateau
  - A Bactrian origin for Zoroastrianism is considered the most likely by many scholars, the Avestan texts were formed in a tribal, kin-focused society, as opposed to the Iranian empires described below which were all monarchies
  - Overall, little is concretely known about early Zoroastrianism
  - Zoroastrianism was also found amongst pre-Christian Georgians and Armenians as well and the Zoroastrian pantheon was found in the Kushan and Sogdia
- Achaemenid (550-330 BCE): Although little is known about the religious beliefs of the first Achaemenid kings, Zoroastrianism took shape during this period
  - The Zoroastrian calendar was used for establishing a ritual year, alongside civil calendars
  - Fire temples were introduced in this period
  - Development of afterlife doctrine- Avestan texts are more vague, later texts introduce a divine triad of judges: Mithra, Rašnu, and Sroaša
  - More detailed creation stories also appear in this period
- Selucid (323-129 BCE): Alexander the Great features very negatively in Zoroastrian narratives for his conquest of the region, but there is not evidence of severe repression of Zoroastrian religious practices during this period
- Parthian (247 BCE-224 CE)
  - Have been sidelined in discussions of Iranian history and Zoroastrianism due to their alleged steppe origins and Greek cultural influences
  - Powerful families' interests were promoted via the construction of temples and other structures
  - Parthians promoted Iranian epics
- Sasanian (224-651 CE)
  - Sasanians aimed to unite Iranians under one king, who rules with the approval of Ahura Mazda
  - Inscriptions from the influential priest Kartir give insight into the centralization of Zoroastrianism during this period
    - Priests were vetted into orthodoxy, temples were built, rituals/priesthood were standardized, and non-Zoroastrian religion was suppressed
  - It was during this period that Iranians were converting to universalist religions for the first time: Christianity, Buddhism, and Manichaeism
    - This led to clashes particularly with Christians, with the Sassanian king unsuccessfully trying to reconvert Armenians to Zoroastrianism
      - By this time, the Zoroastrianism promoted by Sassanians was unrecognizable from Armenians' ancestral faith
  - Official cosmogony espoused by Sassanian court was "Zurvanism"
    - Ohrmazd and Ahreman were the twin offspring of the deity Zurwan
  - Mazdakite movement: All surviving sources are hostile to it, but it seems to have been a movement advocating for redistribution of resources
    - The upheaval caused by this movement caused reforms by the Sasanians, the most important being the codification of the Avesta
      - The Yasna, Visprad, and Videvdad form the core of the written Avesta and the Zand is largely intact for it
      - The other assorted writings have incomplete Zand, and there is also Zand with no corresponding "Avesta"
      - The Avesta began to be studied as text, not only used for rituals
  - The importance of having a priest to validate every ritual was emphasized, and every lay Zoroastrian needed to submit to a priestly authority (dastwar)
  - Worship of non-Avestan deities like Sasan, Nanaia, and Zurwan disappears during this period

### Post-Islamic History

- Conquest (7th century)

- Before Islamic conquest, there was a war between the Byzantines and Sasanians
  - The Muslims ended up defeating both
- The first Muslim raids happened in 634 CE and by 651 CE, parts of Iranian lands were conquered
- Response to conquest
  - Some regions were headed by a Zoroastrian priest who negotiated on behalf of the people
  - Many agreed to pay tax
  - Some converted to Islam and moved on with the Muslim armies
    - After battle of Qadisiya 4,000 troops joined Muslim forces
  - Others resisted and were killed or taken as POW
    - Hormozan fought against Arabs but eventually surrendered and converted to Islam, even becoming an advisor to Umar (RA)
- In this early stage, Muslim garrisons were established but largely did not interact with local Zoroastrians
- Muslims began to dominate landowning in the 8th century and onward

- Age of Conversion (8th to 10th century)
  - With the advent of the Abbasids, conversion to Islam peaked in the 9th century, and it is at this point that the region became majority Muslim
  - Heterodox movements also popped up, mostly in Khorasan
  - There is evidence of destruction of fire temples and other structures during this era as well as the destruction of the sacred tree Cypress of Kasmar
  - A number of Pahlavi texts were put in their final form in this period, as well as restoration of fire temples
    - Some texts like Skand-gumanig wizar also show dialogue with Islam and other religions
  - Ziyarid Dynasty formed in 930 CE, with Mardavij wanting to destroy the presence of Islam from the region
    - This failed as he was killed by his Turkish slaves
  - Both Shi'i and Sunni dynasties expressed interest in claiming ancient Iranian lineage
  - Migration to India (in what would become known as the Parsi community) possibly started in this era, the traditional Parsi narrative of this migration is found in the Qesse-ye Sanjan
    - This story has Zoroastrians fleeing from Iran on a boat, blown by a storm to Sanjan where they're given sanctuary by a Hindu leader
- Dark Ages (11th to 16th centuries)
  - At some point, there was an exodus of Zoroastrians from Iran, likely ordered from the top down by their leaders
  - This was a period in which Zoroastrians are rarely mentioned in Muslim sources and, unlike Jews who had abundant employment by shahs and sultans, became an increasingly insular community
  - This period was a turbulent time in Iranian history with the most catastrophic event being the Mongol invasion, evidence of Zoroastrian communities in Central Asia largely disappears at this point
  - There was contact between Zoroastrians in India and Iran in 26 letters known as Revayats in which Parsis ask Zoroastrian priests questions
- Safavid Period (16th-18th century)
  - Apocalyptic movements were quite common in this period, with monk Gabriel de Chinon reporting that the Zoroastrians were awaiting the reestablishment of their religion
  - Kerman and Yazd were the spiritual centers of Zoroastrianism
  - In 1699, there was a decree forcing conversion to Shi'ism
    - This led to revolts by Sunni Kurds and for Christians to seek European aid, however Zoroastrians had no such allies
  - Zoroastrians were also forced to live outside of the city, due to Shia purity laws
    - It is noted that these purity laws have similarities with Zoroastrian notions of purity, such as not walking with one shoe or clipping nails at night
  - During the Qajar period, Iranian Zoroastrians received some intercession from Parsis and some migrated to India themselves

Modernity

- Parsis
  - The influence of Parsis in Surat in commerce was noted by 18th century European travelers, one important figure was Rustam Manock
    - They also dominated the China-British trade
  - The number of Parsis grew significantly in the latter half of the 1700s
  - The Parsi Punchayet came into inception in the 1720s as a body overseeing the needs of the community
    - From 1830 onward, its leaders became hereditary
    - In the mid-19th century, it lost authority and Parsis were subject to English law, leading to formation of the Parsi Law Association
      - There were conflicts from Bombay Parsis imposing their principles and the government favoring their proposals

        - In 1865 Parsi Matrimonial Courts were formed
    - In the 1900s the Punchayet became a major body for charity
    - There were also court cases in the 1900s (decade) debating on the definition of Parsi and place of converts
- The 19th century was a period of massive social reform and political activity for Parsis
    - Christian missionaries began to target the community, and Parsis would pen refutations in return emphasizing the harmony between their religion and modern science and rationality (e.g. purity rules being good hygiene)
        - The idea that Zoroaster was a monotheist whose teachings were corrupted later by followers adding superstitions also was prominent
        - Some Parsi writers also used Hindu terminology in their works
- In the 19th and 20th centuries a number of Iranian Zoroastrians migrated to India, they would be known as Iranis
- The greatest concern for the Parsi community today is their rapidly declining population due to low birth rates as well as migration

- Iranian Zoroastrians
    - By the 19th century, the Zoroastrian population of Iran was largely constrained to two regions: Yazd and Kerman
        - Even in these regions their population was under 10,000
        - This was a period marked by intense discrimination related to Shia purity rules, which ironically were influenced by Zoroastrianism
    - A large exodus of Iranian Zoroastrians to western India began in the late 18th century and continued to WW2
    - In the 1800s, Parsis began to provide assistance to Iranian Zoroastrians, by in the late 1800s, Zoroastrians in Iran no longer had to pay jizya and official discrimination against them was abolished
    - Unlike Parsis, Iranian Zoroastrians were not particularly close with the British during colonial rule
    - Under the Pahlavis, Zoroastrians gained separate personal status laws as well as as well as other rights, although there was a climate of general repression during this period
    - By the 60s, the majority of the Zoroastrian population of Iran lived in Tehran and the community modernized
        - Nirang (consecrated bull urine) was no longer produced and rituals of purification were no longer performed
        - Priestly rituals were shortened or abolished
        - Like Parsis, modern Iranian Zoroastrians grew to think of Zoroastrianism as a monotheistic religion that was *ethically* dualistic (e.g. humans must fight evil within their soul) and de-emphasized rituals
    - Strains of 20th century Iranian ethnonationalism identified “Arabness” as the root of all problems in Iran, and the solution for this in their view was sought by removing Arab linguistic and religious (Islam as a whole, or just Sunni Islam) elements from Iranian society
        - Elements of these harkening back to the Zoroastrian past are seen in the Pahlavi era: usage of Aryamehr title, Pahlavism book, feasts celebrating 2500 years of kingship in Iran in 1971, replacement in 1976 of Hijra as starting point with founding of Persian Empire
        - The existing Zoroastrian community faced little to no material benefit from this nostalgic nationalism
    - The Islamic revolution was highly critical of the pre-Islamic nationalism found in the Pahlavi era
    - The 1979 constitution of Iran acknowledges the rights of religious minorities, however it can be up to interpretation, and reversed the secularization of the Pahlavis
    - The Zoroastrian community of Iran has declined in the last few decades to less than 20,000 adherents due to low birth rates, laws requiring Zoroastrians to renounce their religion upon marriage with a Muslim, and emigration

**Beliefs**

Dualism

- The defining characteristic of Zoroastrianism is radical dualism: good and evil are fundamentally opposed to each other and this permeates every aspect of our existence
    - Ahura Mazda/Ohrmazd: The supreme being who created good things and keeps track of deeds to punish or reward them
        - Amesha Spenta are seven entities emanating from Ahura Mazda: Spenta Mainyu, Vohu Manah, Asha, Vairya, Armaiti, Haurvatat, Ameretat
        - Yazatas are beings worthy of worship but subordinate to Ahura Mazda
            - This term also applies to the fravashi, the personal spirit of an individual that with help them as they will face judgement at the Bridge of the Selector before going to paradise or hell
                - The faravahar, the most well known symbol of Zoroastrianism, may be a

representation of the fravashi
        - Zoroastrians are expected to align themselves with the Truth/Aša through good thoughts, good words, and good deeds against falsehood/Druj
            - Earlier literature generally references this mantra in relation to proper performance of rituals, whereas in Pahlavi literature it is more a general ethical sense
        - Ahura Mazda is omniscient and omnibenevolent but can only act in what is possible for him (good)
    - Angra Mainiiu/Ahreman: The evil force who created bad things
        - Daevas are evil entities who are rejected
            - Old age and death are considered evil caused by the demons Zarman and Astwihad, respectively
        - His nature was understood as somewhat limited compared to Ohrman's, some texts also mention him residing within humans
    - Zurvanism: A strain of Zoroastrianism that posits Ohrman and Ahreman as twin spirits created by Zurvan, the deity of time
    - Even aspects of physical world were firmly in the dualist framework, with the stars being beneficial and planets (as well as a variety of animals such as reptiles) being maleficent

Cosmology

- Zoroastrianism divides existence into two dimensions: mental/spiritual (menog) and "living"/physical (getig)
    - Unlike some other dualistic philosophies (e.g. Manichaeism), the physical realm is not disparaged
    - According to Pahlavi sources, Ahreman does not fully exist within the getig dimension, although his negative actions in the mental dimension can bleed into the living
        - Ahura Mazda's creation was originally perfect and negative aspects of existence (such as death) are due to this influence
- Zoroastrianism describes two types of time: boundless and limited
    - While Ohrmazd permanently stays in boundless time, lesser deities such as Tištriia may venture into limited time
    - Ohrmazd "interrupted" boundless time when he realized the existence of Ahreman in order to prevent direct (and therefore eternal) conflict
- Timeline
    - With Ohrmazd's interruption of time, a period of 12,000 years started, divided equally into menog state and getig state
        - Menog
            - Ahreman rejects Ohrmazd's peace offer. Ohrmazd, expecting this, prepared a trap by offering Ahreman a battle at a fixed time and place. Ahreman accepts.
            - Due to a prayer by Ohrmazd, Ahreman sleeps for the latter half of the menog state
        - Getig
            - Ahreman is awoken by demoness Jeh and the Evil Spirit attacks creation, another 6000 years follow
            - The first 3,000 begin with the first man (Gayomard) and ends with Zoroaster's revelation
                - Gayomard was a primordial giant. His death, along with that of his companion, gave birth to a variety of plant and animal species.
                - At this death, his sperm dropped out to the ground and eventually the originating human couple (Masya and Masyane) formed from it.
                    - This story was used to glorify xwedodah, as Gayomard was born from Ohrmazd and his daughter, his sperm was used with his mother to produce Masya and Masyane, who then coupled themselves.
            - Gayomard accepted Ahura Mazda's religion but unlike Zoroaster did not spread it.
            - The second 3,000 (and therefore the entire cycle) will feature the birth of three Sosans
- Heaven consists of stars, moon, the sun, and 'lights without beginning' (which paradise is located in)
- Earth is conceived as round and divided into seven regions
    - The central one being the 'land of the Aryans' and the place where Zoroaster received revelation: sixteen different lands created by Ahura Mazda and then harmed by Angra Mainyu
        - Almost all of these are located to the east of modern day Iran, with southeast Afghanistan in particular being overrepresented
        - The cosmic Mount Hara is at the center, so tall it reaches the heavens
- Astrology is not found in Avestan texts but entered the Zoroastrian realm through Greek influence and can be found in Pahlavi sources
    - Astrology was extremely important in the Sassanid empire, with astrologers casting horoscopes for the royal family every year and playing an intellectual role as translators and transmitters of knowledge
    - The importance of celestial bodies in Zoroastrianism predates this, however, with the sun and moon being considered divine and the 6th/7th Avestan hymns being dedicated to them
        - Stars also have importance, especially Sirius/Tištriia who features in a tale about a battle against a

demon who inhabited the waters

Zoroaster/Zarathustra

- Spiritual founder of Zoroastrianism
- His year and place of birth are both unclear
  - Zoroastrian tradition places his birth "258 years before the time of Alexander", around 620-550 BCE
    - The earliest mention of him is in a Greek source dating from the mid 5th century BCE, however there is not evidence external to the Gathas that he existed as a historical figure
    - Most academics place him much earlier than that, ranging from 1700 to 1000 BCE
  - Rey of Media (in modern day Iran) is often placed as Zarathustra's origin by Pahlavi literature
    - However a Bactrian origin may be more plausible based on topographical details in various texts
- A number of miracles took place before and at his birth, the most notable being his laughter and recitation of the Ahunwar when he was born
- In his youth, karaps (priests of the old religion whose authority Zoroaster rejected) made many failed attempts on his life
- At the age of 30, Zoroaster met Ohrmazd and accepted the mission to spread his religion, which was revealed over several meetings
- After meeting Ohrmazd, Zoroaster began to openly preach the religion, gaining the ire of the karaps
  - His first follower was his cousin
- Zoroaster went to King Wistasp's court and provided him with the Avesta, but after being framed by court priests as a sorcerer was thrown in prison
  - While in prison, Wistasp's horse mysteriously lost all four of its legs, and only Zoroaster was able to heal the horse after getting the king to agree to recognizing his prophethood, protecting him, and punishing the priests who framed him
  - After this, Zoroaster served as the king's priest of priests until his death
- A variety of non-Zoroastrian (mostly Greek) texts in the ancient world were spuriously attributed to Zarathustra, making him a symbol of "exotic" knowledge
- Post-Islamic works such as 'Birth of Zarathustra' provide a more coherent narrative of his life (along with miracles), in line with Islamic prophetic literature
  - Some texts from the Islamic period also identified him with Ibrahim, possibly to gain legitimacy under Muslim rulers, as this was abandoned after the colonial period
  - Parsis utilized Indic vocabulary in their translations, such as 'guru'
- Portraits of Zarathustra were uncommon in premodern times but popularized in the 1800s

Eschatology

- The last 3,000 years of the 12,000 year cycle feature the birth of three sons (Sosans) posthumously fathered by Zoroaster
- These sons are conceived when a virgin bathes in the Lake Kayanse, where Zoroaster's seed is guarded
  - Usedar
    - At his birth, the sun will stand still for 10 days and vegetation will blossom for three years
    - At 30, he converses with Ohrzmazd
    - In year 300 of his millennium, a huge demonic wolf will appear and be destroyed after Usedar performs a sacrifice
    - Around halfway through the millennium a terrible winter will be caused by Malkos (and stopped by Dahman Afrin) after which the earth will be populated again
    - After the 5th century of his millennium most Iranian and Turanian nations will follow Truth and nobody will die from illness
  - Usedarmah
    - At his birth, the sun will stand still 20 days and the vegetation will blossom for six years
    - At 30, he will converse with Ohrmazd
    - All serpents will unite into a giant dragon which is destroyed by Usedarmah and his men, freeing the world from all xrafstars
    - No one will die except from violent death and old age
    - Dahag will free himself only to be killed by Kersasp
    - 53 years before end, Mazdeans will give up meat
    - 3 years before end of millennium give up milk, eating only water and vegetables
  - Saoshyant
    - The sun will stand still for 30 days at his birth
    - Humans will eat vegetables, then only water, then spirit alone
    - Ahreman will be destroyed and the Sosans perform a ritual leading to Renovation of the World and Resurrection of the Dead

**Practices**

Priesthood

- Navar is the initiation into priesthood
  - Traditionally performed when the boy is 9-13 and takes several weeks to undergo, ending in the public appointment of the boy dressed up in regalia
  - In Iran the ritual is simplified and only adults enter the priesthood
- Priesthood is traditionally male and hereditary (only the sons in certain lineages are eligible to become priests)
  - This was a part of the greater hereditary class structure that existed in pre-Islamic Iran
  - Marriage with women from the laity was discouraged until recently
  - In Iran, the distinction between priestly and laity castes was abolished after the Islamic Revolution and laymen men and even women have been admitted as priests
- Historically, priests gatekept religious rituals and oral tradition in order to inform orthodoxy amongst followers
  - Some texts say every Zoroastrian should have a priest as a personal authority and spiritual reference
- Today, professional priests are mainly found amongst Parsis rather than Iranian Zoroastrians or the diaspora, and priesthood has lost much of its prestige since the 1800s
  - There has been a shift in the last few centuries of preferring fire temples over priests' homes, but any pure space is suitable for rituals

Marriage

- Marriage and having progeny is highly praised in Zoroastrianism, and waste of seed is viewed as negative
  - Male progeny in particular were prized with special allowances made to ensure men would have a male heir, with a variety of special marriages 'lending' a man's wife/daughter/sister to another man to produce a male heir attributed to him
  - Contracts were drawn up for marriage ensuring the rights and obligations of husband and wife
  - Abortion is condemned
  - Although female homosexuality is never directly referred to, male homosexuality is condemned as it cannot produce children
- Polygyny was traditionally practiced by elites and men whose first wife could not have children, although the exact prevalence is unknown and it is no longer practiced
- Xwedodah is the practice of near-kin marriage (a man marrying his mother, sister, or daughter)
  - Prevalence is unknown and it died out some time after Islamic conquest, although it is praised in Zoroastrian texts and foreign sources note this practice
- The Zoroastrian attitude to divorce has varied throughout history
  - Before Islamic conquest, a man could divorce his wife for sorcery, adultery, failure to purify herself during menstruating
  - After Islamic conquest when Zoroastrians became a minority, divorce became much more discouraged with only apostasy and adultery being valid grounds
  - In recent years rules have relaxed, with restriction on remarriage of widows and divorcees being lifted as well
- Priests recite a blessing over weddings

Law

- By the Sassanid era, law was a developed discipline and judges took three  sources into consideration: the Avesta, Zand, and consensus of the righteous
  - In comparison to generally more egalitarian Avestan norms, Sassanid era law more clearly distinguished between men/women and free/slave
  - There were many regulations against harming beneficiant creatures (e.g. dogs, cattle), although killing of maleficent creatures (e.g. insects, reptiles) was prescribed
  - Sassanid jurisprudence was highly concerned with ensuring continuity of lineage, allowing a variety of different marriages where a man's wife/daughter/sister could bear children from another man that would be attributed to him
  - Property law was highly developed by this period as well, with a special category being "property of the soul"
    - Could be set apart by founder for ceremonies or charity, this could stay in the family for generations although they couldn't change the purpose of it
      - To this day, charitable foundations are very prominent amongst Parsis due to their economic success
  - Corporal punishments could vary from fines to the death penalty, depending on the severity and frequency of the crime (bodily injury to others, disregarding purity rules, etc.)
  - After Islamic conquest Zoroastrian law maintained jurisprudence over the community in many areas especially marriage and family law
- The most developed modern Zoroastrian law is that of the Parsi personal law in India which generally concerns inheritance, marriage, and religious trusts
  - The most relevant laws are the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act and the Parsi Intestate Succession Act

Prayer

- A common belief in Indo-Iranian religion is that certain mantras have inherent power, and the Gathas themselves are viewed as very powerful and sacred prayers
- The most prominent mantras are Ahuna Vairya, Airyaman ishya, Ashem vohu, and Yenghe hatam
- The Sros Baj is a potent combination of prayers used in many rituals and memorized by children before initiation
- There are niyayisn prayers addressed to the Sun, Moon, Mithra, Anahita, and Fire
  - These may reflect pre-Zoroastrian traditions that were incorporated into the religion
- Gah prayers are recited at the beginning of the five watches (gah) of the day
  - Traditionally the domain of priests but now recited by lay people as well
- Afrinagan prayers are liturgies for the Afrinagan ceremony
- Many later Zoroastrian prayers were written down in Pazand, a Middle Persian language
  - Patet are a generally short type of prayer to repent of one's sins, these possibly came from Christian or Manichaean influence as prayers of contrition are absent in the Avesta
  - Du'a refer to informal personal prayers
  - Nirangs are incantations that are recited at specific times (e.g. to defeat sorcerers, waking up in the morning)
  - Monajat are prayers that are intimate, like a conversation, and may invoke the divine's qualities, praise Zoroaster, give thanks, ask for forgiveness or a variety of boons
    - These were a highly popular genre of prayer until the 20th century as part of a general trend to remove foreign influences from the religion (as monajat were likely influenced by Islamic practice)

Rituals

- Attitudes on conversion are mixed, with Parsis generally being opposed to conversions and Iranian Zoroastrians being more open-minded
- Purity
  - Dead matter (nasu) is polluting, meaning that corpse bearers are perpetually impure and traditionally were segregated at events
    - This is also the reasoning behind the traditional Zoroastrian exposure of a corpse (as opposed to burial or cremation which would pollute the elements)
  - Sexual intercourse and menstruation is also polluting
    - Until the mid 20th century, Iranian Zoroastrian villages had outbuildings for menstruating women to be away from water or fire
    - In India, menstruating Parsi women would generally stay in one part of the house
  - Purity rituals are not as commonly performed in modern times but were historically very important
    - Padyab: Private ablution done before prayers or meals, after waking up or going to the bathroom
    - Nahn: More elaborate rite that traditionally involves a priest and is done before initiation, before marriage, after giving birth, and during the holy days
    - Barasnum: Longest purification rite, involving a nine day seclusion, done to drive out Nasu (corpse demoness) from people who were polluted by contact with a corpse
- Animal sacrifice:
  - Historically very prominent practice as a gift to the gods
    - Abandoned in the 19th-20th centuries in India
    - In Iran, sacrifices are still performed for some festivals but only eating properly sacrificed meat has largely been abandoned
- The day is divided into five ritual periods (gah), each of which are governed by a divine model (ratu) and requiring a given set of prayers and padyab
- Priestly rituals:
  - Priestly rituals are held in the presence of fire, priests take care of the consecrated fires in the fire temples
    - Traditional the fire received wood and praise/worship
    - Ritual fire caretaking is not as common in Iran as India and the emphasis on fire has been downplayed in the last century
  - Baj-dharna/dron yast is a short liturgy where no haoma is produced
  - The Yasna takes several hours to perform and today is not performed outside of India
  - The most complex ritual is the 18+ day nirangdin which traditionally requires bull's urine
    - No longer in practice in Iran
  - Priests also consecrate different food items
- Initiation (called Navjote by Parsis)
  - Traditionally, a person was only viewed as accountable for their deeds (good or bad) after initiation
  - It was also after initiation someone would wear kusti (cord) and sedre (shirt)
    - Historically very important but in Iran has been downplayed to ceremonial status
  - Parsi children are generally initiated between 7 and 10, Iranian Zoroastrian children a bit older

- Funeral
  - First period starts from the onset of death (when Nasu takes hold of the body and soul separates from it) to the funeral
    - Close family doesn't eat meat
    - Rituals are done to protect from the impurity of the corpse, such as having a dog view the corpse
    - Bodies were traditionally disposed of in "Towers of Silence" so that the body would not contaminate the soil, but burials are now common
  - Second period lasts for three days until the soul departs for the other world
    - Liturgies are done for Sraoša who takes care of the soul in its transitional period

Festivals

- Calendars
  - Within the Parsi community, three different calendars are used: Qadimi (old), Rasmi or Šenšai (traditional), and Fasli (seasonal)
  - Iranian Zoroastrians use the Bastani calendar which is largely in line with the Fasli calendar
- Nowruz: New Year
  - Arguably the biggest Zoroastrian celebration, also celebrated secularly by some non-Zoroastrian Iranic people
  - Iranian Zoroastrians have a haft sin table which is an arrangement of seven different items
    - Can include additional items such as a picture of Zoroaster, painted eggs, or sweets
  - Pateti: New Year's Eve in the Šenšai calendar, a day of atoning for bad thoughts, words, and deeds
- Gahanbars: Six seasonal celebrations, each one representing one of the Amesha Spentas
  - Celebrations might not actually "match up" with seasons due to different calendars used
  - More emphasized in Iranian communities than amongst Parsis
  - Includes prayers and communal feasts
- There are days dedicated to certain yazatas/deities
  - Mehragan: Celebrated by Iranian Zoroastrians, traditionally included a ceremonially killed sheep/lamb although the sacrifice is now not as common
  - Tirgan: Coincides with the middle of the midsummer gahanbar, includes rituals for prosper and good luck
  - "Birthday" of the waters: Parsis prepare a ritual tray and hymns to the waters
  - "Birthday" of the fire: Parsis clean the part of the where the afargan stands and decorate it, and recite hymns to the fire
- Zoroaster's birth and death days are also observed
- Sade: Commemorated with the building of a massive bonfire

**Texts**

- Avesta: Primary and earliest Zoroastrian literature collection.
  - The 'Old Avestan' texts include the Gathas, Yasna Haptanghaiti, and some short manthras and were composed between 1500 and 900 BCE
    - Shows more similarities to Indic religion
  - The 'Young Avestan' texts contain more geographical references and were composed between 900 and 400 BCE
  - The Avesta was preserved orally for centuries before being written in the Sassanid era, the oldest surviving manuscript is from the 13th century CE
  - Sections:
    - Yasna: Primary liturgical collection, contains the most important prayers recited during the yasna ceremony.
      - Gathas: Oldest and most well preserved text, hymns
    - Visperad: Supplements of the yasna.
    - Vendidad: Mostly prescriptive codes rather than liturgy.
    - Yasht: Hymns dedicated to various divinities.
    - Siroza: Dedications to deities presiding over the thirty days of the month.
    - Nyayeshe: Prayers addressed to sun, Mithra, moon, waters, and fire.
    - Gahs: Dedications to deities presiding over the five divisions of the day.
    - Afrinagan: Prayers for special occasions.
  - The premodern view was that they were revealed by Ahura Mazda to Zarathustra, however since the 20th century it is common for Zoroastrians to believe they were authored by Zarathustra
- Middle Persian texts
  - With few exceptions, premodern Zoroastrian texts were produced by priests rather than laymen.
  - Zand are commentary of Avestan texts
  - Notable Classical Middle Persian (8th-10th century) texts
    - Book of Arda Viraf: Describes the dream journey of a Zoroastrian into the next world
    - Bundahishn: Cosmological text

        - Denkard: Compendium of Zoroastrian beliefs
        - Shikand-gumanig Vizar: Polemics against other religions
- New Persian texts
    - The most notable New Persian text is Zaratostnama, a narrative poem on Zoroaster's life
    - Rivayats were exchanges between Zoroastrians in India and in Iran